

**THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

A GUIDE FOR SUPERVISORS

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WHAT IS THE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM?

The Los Angeles County Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a County-sponsored program to provide behavioral health services, including help with personal or work-related issues, for employees and their dependents. Services include a professional **assessment** of the problem or situation that the client presents; **counseling** toward resolving the problem when the EAP professional assesses a likelihood that very brief intervention (no more than a few sessions) may be productive; and **referral** to appropriate helping resources when there is a need for other specialized or less time-limited services. In many cases, the EAP professional will encourage or facilitate a referral to behavioral health or psychiatric services available through the **employee's health plan**.

EAP staff members are also experienced trainers, providing a range of **training programs** to departments intended to foster employee well-being, and workplace efficiency and productivity. EAP clinicians are also available to provide **consultation** to supervisors and managers regarding personnel matters.

Credentialed EAP staff

Our EAP staff is comprised of professionals trained and licensed in various behavioral health disciplines, including Marriage and Family Therapy, Clinical Social Work, and Psychology.

HOW DOES THE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM WORK?

- EAP services are provided **by appointment only**. EAP appointments may be scheduled Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. by calling (213) 738-4200. The EAP is not structured to provide walk-in or emergency services. Supervisors who are unaware of measures or resources to address behavioral or emotional crises that an employee may experience in the work place may call the EAP and speak to a staff member for consultation and recommendations. Also, the EAP offers a one-hour training program on identifying and managing "The Troubled Employee," which includes information about resources available to County departments to respond to a range of behavioral and emotional conditions, including psychiatric emergencies.
- Headquarters of the EAP is at the following location:

3333 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1000
Los Angeles, CA 90010

Clinicians are maintained at this location on weekdays during appointment hours, although training and other activities often bring EAP staff members to other locations and facilities throughout the County system.

Appointments may also be arranged at the following satellite locations by calling the EAP's central phone number, (213) 738-4200:

Olive View / UCLA Medical Center
14445 Olive View Drive
Education Department Building, Room # 241
Sylmar, CA 91342

El Monte District Office – 04
3400 Aerojet Avenue, 5th floor
El Monte, CA 91731

Martin Luther King
12021 South Wilmington Avenue
Human Resources Building, 2nd floor
Los Angeles, CA 90059

- Appointment sessions are **confidential** except for special circumstances that require disclosure by law, such as an acknowledgment of child and elder abuse or an intention to harm self or others. Otherwise, no confidential information is disclosed without the employee's written authorization or a lawful directive, such as a court order.
- Sessions are **free** to the client. The EAP is funded by the Workers' Compensation Trust Fund, with proportionate fund support from each department. However, any costs or time commitments associated with services recommended to the employee by the EAP but provided by other resources are solely the responsibility of the employee.
- Consistent with the policy originally endorsed by the Board of Supervisors in 1981, the employee's **first visit can be on County time** with the supervisor's permission. At the discretion of the department head, or by department policy, additional visits may be on County time as well. Otherwise, the employee may use his/her accumulated benefits to charge the time for subsequent appointments. Even if the supervisor authorizes the EAP visit to be on County time, the confidential nature of the service is maintained. The supervisor is not at liberty to inquire into the nature of the problem prompting the employee to seek EAP services. Nor is it appropriate for a supervisor to inquire about what transpires in the EAP session.
- When the supervisor authorizes an employee to attend a session on County time, the EAP professional signs and provides to the employee a "**Confirmation of Visit**" slip to submit to the supervisor, indicating the date, time-in, and time-out for the session. IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE EMPLOYEE TO PRESENT THE CONFIRMATION OF VISIT SLIP TO THE SUPERVISOR. Unless attendance is verified by the Confirmation of Visit slip, the EAP must have the employee's written authorization to verify attendance for department

personnel or provide other information regarding the employee's EAP participation.

- Although referrals of employees to the EAP by supervisors are encouraged, the employee's participation is **voluntary**. EAP services tend to be most effective for the troubled employee who is motivated for positive change and receptive to the assessment feedback and recommendations of the EAP professional.

Requiring an employee's participation is contrary to EAP policy. If there are indications that a psychological or substance abuse problem is hindering performance or conduct, and voluntary measures or supervisory counseling have proven to be insufficient, a request for **psychological reevaluation**, conducted by the Psychological Services Unit of Occupational Health Programs, may be an appropriate alternative. Civil Service Rule 9.07(B) provides that a department may request a medical or psychological reevaluation to determine an employee's capacity to perform the duties of his/her position satisfactorily and without hazard to self or others. Supervisors may address inquiries about the psychological reevaluation process, or the appropriateness of the process in a particular case, to their Human Resources staff, or to the Chief of Psychological Services, CEO Occupational Health Programs, (213) 738-2213.

WHY HAVE AN EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM?

As indicated in the EAP's original Policy Statement, "The purpose of the Employee Assistance Program is to provide a system enabling management, supervisors and employees to deal constructively with reduced job performance. The underlying principles of the program include recognition that problems of a personal nature such as those involving family, alcohol use, finances, or social and general health can adversely impact the job performance of otherwise productive workers. Observation of signs of such problems, and referral of the employee for assistance, are a component part of such a system."

The supervisor has an obligation to establish and maintain a safe and productive work environment. That task requires awareness that personal problems of employees are a fact of life and can be handled constructively to the benefit of both the employees and employer. The EAP is available to help all levels of employees manage problems in their personal and work lives. It can help employees cope with:

- Emotional problems such as fear, anxiety, and depression
- Marital and family discord
- Parent/Child concerns
- Bereavement/Loss
- Alcohol/Drug problems
- Interpersonal problems
- Job-related issues
- Other problems of daily living

We all have personal problems. While we may usually handle them successfully, sometimes they can become complex, confusing, and even overwhelming. When this happens, their effects on job performance may include absenteeism, mistakes, accidents, conflicts with supervisors and/or co-workers, and lowered productivity and quality of work. As a supervisor, you have a responsibility to help identify both satisfactory and declining job performance and to offer employees opportunities and means for resolving performance problems.

Your consultation with an EAP professional can help you develop constructive suggestions for a troubled or difficult employee. In some cases, early identification of a troubled employee, and timely referral to the EAP, may be all that is necessary to avert a major decline and restore the employee's job performance to a satisfactory level.

YOUR ROLE AS A SUPERVISOR

The supervisor is the vital link between a quality product and an effective work force. To establish an effective work force, the supervisor must be able to gain the respect and cooperation of the people who work for him or her. Respect is earned by demonstrating qualities of leadership, including the capacity to recognize skills, delegate responsibility, motivate the individual employee, and foster team harmony.

Motivation, feedback, early intervention

Look for opportunities to motivate by acknowledging appropriate initiative, personal strengths, demonstrated effort, a cooperative attitude, and contribution to productivity. Relate clearly and fairly to supervisees. Offer opportunities and suggestions to help them improve their skills. If one member of the team is shirking an assigned fair share of the workload, or is creating hardships on others by tardiness, absenteeism, limited productivity, or a negative attitude, it is the supervisor's duty to address the problem in its early stages. In many cases, prompt action on your part can get the troubled employee back on track and minimize damage to the team and overall productivity.

Respect privacy

As a supervisor you are undoubtedly aware that problems such as alcoholism/drugs, marital/family discord, emotional problems, or financial difficulties impact work performance. In some cases the troubled employee may spontaneously acknowledge a problem and seek the supervisor's understanding and recommendations. However, the supervisor should not direct inquiries into an employee's personal matters, or offer personal recommendations for resolving such matters. Such inquiries and recommendations are outside of the boundaries of the employee-supervisor relationship, may be perceived as invasive, and may have unfavorable repercussions ranging from formal actions against the supervisor to less direct disruptions of trust and communication.

Offer EAP services

On the other hand, advising an apparently troubled employee of the availability of the Employee Assistance Program to help with any personal concerns that may be impairing work performance is not only acceptable but encouraged. After all, it is your responsibility to deal with an employee's unsatisfactory performance or behavior, and measures that support the employee's well-being often have a positive effect on performance, particularly in the early stages of a developing problem. Simply giving to the employee the descriptive EAP brochure, with a brief verbal statement such as, "This is a helpful resource that you may want to consider," may be enough to lead the employee to a corrective path.

When the problem persists

If the employee declines the EAP referral, or accepts but continues to perform inadequately, other measures may be necessary to reinforce your expectation that performance will improve to a satisfactory level. You may decide to schedule an additional conference with the employee to further evaluate the performance problem (including problems of attendance or conduct) and clarify expectations. Before taking further corrective actions, review your concerns with your own supervisor, and seek consultation from your Human Resources staff to insure that your actions conform with accepted policies and practices.

AVOID NEGLIGENT SUPERVISION

Waiting to do something about an identified problem frequently allows it to worsen for both the supervisor and employee.

Supervisory counseling regarding performance deficiencies, attendance shortcomings, or conduct problems is not a pleasant task. Nor is every supervisor comfortable suggesting to an apparently troubled employee that he/she may wish to consider the Employee Assistance Program if there is a current need for help.

A supervisor's reluctance to approach an employee regarding signs of distress or discontent that are impacting performance often reflects the supervisor's uneasiness or apprehension about triggering negative reactions on the part of the employee, or becoming involved in matters of a sensitive nature beyond the supervisor's expertise. The supervisor must be able to recognize these feelings and accept them as natural, but not allow them to delay or prevent appropriate supervisory action. A delay in referring an employee to the EAP, or in counseling the employee regarding performance deficiencies, can interfere with the employee's timely access to needed help, and can allow a potentially correctable problem to worsen unnecessarily. Furthermore, the supervisor's failure to address a problem can have unfavorable ramifications for the workload, morale, or even the safety of other workers.

SIGNS OF A TROUBLED EMPLOYEE

Many kinds of personal problems can affect job performance. Sometimes the signs of personal problems are easy to detect, as when an employee reports to work in a state of intoxication, or has crying episodes, or shows atypical irritability. In other cases, the signs may be more subtle, such as a gradual decline in the quality of work, or incidents of uncharacteristic tardiness. Following are some signs that an employee may be personally troubled or disturbed and may warrant supervisory attention and an awareness of EAP services.

Deteriorating performance

- Lowered productivity as compared to past performance
- Increased mistakes, carelessness, errors in judgment
- Inconsistent work quality or work pace (alternating periods of high and low productivity)
- Decreased concentration
- Difficulty in recalling instructions or procedures

Poor attendance

- Increased unscheduled absences
- Increased tardiness
- Frequent absences around weekends or holidays
- Early departures or unexplained disappearances from work area
- Increasingly improbable excuses for absences

Deteriorating attitude and interactions with others

- Overreaction to normal criticism by peers or others
- Sudden changes in mood
- Withdrawal from, or avoidance of, fellow workers
- Repeated arguments with co-workers or angry flare-ups
- Unreasonable intolerance or suspicion
- Frequent personal phone calls
- Uncooperative and unmotivated attitude

Changes in physical appearance

- Marked deterioration in personal grooming, dress, appearance
- Rapid and significant weight gain or loss
- Frequent crying spells
- Constant fatigue

As a supervisor, you need to be alert to the signs that personal problems may be interfering with an employee's job performance. Recognition of the particular signs and circumstances is important in determining an appropriate course of supervisory action.

COUNSELING THE PERFORMANCE IMPAIRED EMPLOYEE

Finding the key to improving a troubled employee's job performance can be difficult. However, a systematic approach can help you determine what action is needed to improve performance and help the employee cope more effectively with personal problems.

Supervisory steps toward improvement

Through supervisory counseling, insure that the employee knows what is expected regarding job performance, and in what areas of performance or conduct the employee is not meeting standards. Remind or advise the employee of any relevant County or departmental policies or rules (i.e., **Countywide Drug Free Workplace and Zero Tolerance**). Indicate the availability of the Employee Assistance Program to address any personal concerns that may be contributing to the employee's job problems. Based on the employee's particular problem areas, offer **specific** recommendations and explore feasible measures to support the employee's improvement efforts. Document and summarize the supervisory counseling session, including mutually understood objectives for correcting the problem.

Foundation for administrative measures

Monitor performance for signs of improvement or further decline in the work pattern. Maintain an interactive communication process with the employee during the problem period, providing feedback, clarifying goals and expectations, and eliciting the employee's own questions, comments, and suggestions for improvement. Consider your options for assisting the employee, and seek to provide any appropriate technical assistance, clarifications, or if a medical or psychological disability is involved reasonable accommodations needed to appropriately address the employee's performance difficulties. Document the interaction, and confirm the communication with the employee's signature. Bear in mind that the success of any subsequent administrative measures that you and the department take, based on the employee's performance and conduct, may depend heavily on the documented trail of responsible action steps that preceded. Consult with your own supervisor regarding management of the case. Before taking any measures of a disciplinary nature, or before taking actions for performance impairments that may relate to a disability, consult with your department's Human Resources staff.